
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

ESB 5583

Brief Description: Requiring training of children's administration employees concerning older children who are victims of abuse or neglect.

Sponsors: Senators Regala, Hargrove, McAuliffe, Stevens, Carrell, Kline, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to develop a curriculum to train staff on how to screen and respond to referrals to Child Protective Services involving victims of abuse or neglect between the ages of 11 and 18.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to review screening decisions by Child Protective Services related to children between the ages of 11 and 18.

Hearing Date: March 24, 2005.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to investigate complaints of any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, or sexual abuse or exploitation, or that presents an imminent risk of serious harm. If the investigation reveals that a crime against a child may have been committed, the DSHS is required to notify the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Child Protective Services (CPS) within the Children's Administration (CA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides 24-hour, seven-day-a-week intake, screening, and investigative services for reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. The CPS social workers investigate reports of child abuse and neglect to assess the safety and protection needs of children, and, when necessary, intervene by providing services designed to increase safety and protect children from further harm. When it appears that a child is in danger of being harmed or has already been seriously abused or neglected, the CPS, with a police officer or court order putting the child in protective custody, places the child with a relative or in foster care.

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) was created in the Governor's Office for the purpose of: promoting public awareness and understanding of family and children services; identifying system issues and responses for the Governor and the Legislature to act upon; and monitoring and ensuring compliance with administrative acts, relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to family and children's services and the placement, supervision, and treatment of children in the state's care or in state-licensed facilities or residences. In its 2003 Annual Report, the OFCO included a recommendation concerning treatment of older children and adolescents by CPS. The OFCO recommended that the CA mandate that older children and adolescents receive appropriate child protective services and that they not be treated differently solely because of their age. In particular, referrals alleging physical abuse against an older child or adolescent should be investigated and not screened out on the premise that youths can more adequately protect themselves.

Summary of Bill:

Curriculum

The DSHS is required to develop a curriculum designed to train the staff of the CA who assess or provide services to adolescents on how to screen and respond to referrals to CPS when those referrals may involve victims of abuse or neglect between the ages of 11 and 18. At a minimum, the curriculum must include the following:

- review of relevant laws and regulations, including the requirement that the DSHS investigate complaints if a parent's or caretaker's actions result in serious physical or emotional harm or present an imminent risk of serious harm to any person under 18;
- review of policies of the CA that require assessment and screening of abuse and neglect referrals on the basis of risk and not age;
- explanation of safety assessment and risk assessment models;
- case studies of situations in which the DSHS has received reports of alleged abuse or neglect of older children and adolescents;
- discussion of best practices in screening and responding to referrals involving older children and adolescents; and
- discussion of how abuse and neglect referrals related to adolescents are investigated and when law enforcement must be notified.

As it develops the required curriculum, the DSHS must request that the OFCO review and comment on its proposed training materials. The DSHS is required to consider the comments and recommendations of the OFCO as it develops the curriculum

The DSHS is required to complete the curriculum materials no later than December 31, 2005.

Training

The DSHS is required to train the CPS workers who screen intake calls on how to screen and respond to referrals that may involve victims of abuse or neglect between the ages of 11 and 18. The training must be based substantially on the developed curriculum and must be completed by December 31, 2005.

The DSHS is required to use the developed curriculum to train all CA staff responsible for assessing or providing services to older children and adolescents by April 30, 2006.

The DSHS is required to include the curriculum in its training of all new employees of the CA.

The DSHS is required to keep a record of all employees who have attended the required training.

Case Reviews

The DSHS is required to review a sampling of not less than 30 percent of the screening decisions by CPS related to children between the ages of 11 and 18 on a quarterly basis through June 30, 2007. The DSHS is required to use the results of the quarterly reviews to improve practice and to improve the required curriculum.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 15, 2005.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.